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Reply to: **Tampa**

April 17, 2002

**COCAINE TRAFFICKER CONVICTED**

TAMPA - Wenceslao Cetre was convicted late Tuesday afternoon in federal court following a two-day jury trial before the Honorable Richard A. Lazzara, United States District Judge. The jury deliberated for less than one-half hour before reaching its verdict.

Cetre, age 48, of Colombia, was found guilty of conspiring to distribute cocaine while on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. The jury also found Cetre guilty of possessing cocaine with intent to distribute it while on board a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. Cetre was the captain of a "go-fast" vessel, which was transporting over two tons of cocaine from Colombia to Mexico. Trial testimony indicated that the wholesale value of the cocaine in the United States would have been between \$40 and \$50 million. When the vessel's crew noticed a Coast Guard vessel approaching, Cetre instructed the crew to burn the boat and its cargo. Before Coast Guard personnel reached the boat, its crew set it on fire and jumped into the ocean. The Coast Guard personnel rescued the crew, extinguished the fire and attempted to salvage the vessel, but it eventually sank. The Coast Guard boarding team took the crew members into custody. The team recovered a number of cocaine bales floating in the ocean. The crew members, who were also charged in the indictment, entered pleas of guilty prior to trial.

Because of the amount of cocaine involved in these offenses, Cetre faces a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years' up to life imprisonment.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the United States Customs Service. It was prosecuted by James A. Muench, an Assistant United States Attorney in the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force Section.